[James Childers]

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[James Childers, 82,?] living at Copeville, Texas, was born in Chamberburg, Ky., May 14, 1857, on a farm operated by his father, J. H. Childers, James was reared in a long cabin. The Family depended on their cultivated land, and [natur?] bounty abounding in the forest for their livelihood. When James was 8 years old his father departed from his native state and traveled to Ark. Later, at the age of 18, James went to the Indian Territory (now Okla.) He secured work on a cattle ranch located in, what was then, No-Man's -Land. After he terminated his range career, he engaged in farming for a livelihood.

His story of range life follows:

“My native state is Ky. I was born at a place called [Chambersburg?], located on the Ohio River. The event happened on May 14, 1857.

“My father, J. H. Childers, was one/ of the early settlers of the section. During my childhood, the country was sparsely settled. Farming and logging was the means of making a livelihood.

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“I shall describe the condition under which my family lived, and it will be a fair illustration of the community as a whole.

“Our home was a two room log cabin. The average home was two rooms, some were one room structures and a few were three rooms. The homes consisted of a hallway with rooms on either side. One or two of the rooms contained a fire place. The fire places supplied heat when required, and the [means?] of cooking food. Also, the fire place furnished most of the light for the room during the dark hours, except during the summer season and then cadles were used. If company was making a call, we would light the coal oil lamp.

“During my childhood days I did not know what custom made clothes were. C12 [2/11/41?] [-?] [Texas?] 2 So far as my knowledge was concerned, homespun was the only clothing people were able/ to secure. My folks, as all our neighbors did, raised the materials worked it into thread, weaved the thread into cloth, and from this cloth made clothes. Even our shoes were made likewise.

“The hides from our butchered stock were taken to the tanner of the community, who made leather out of the hides, the shoemaker made the shoes, and these were good shoes too. The clothes were, also, good, “and the same may be said about our food, which was all produced by our hands, except some of the spices used for seasoning.

“Vegetables in abundance were raised in our garden, most of which was kept in a cellar from one crop to another.

“We raised wheat, corn and oats, which gave us flour, corn meal, and feed for the stock. We hauled the grain to the grist mill and traded grain to the miller for the milling charge. We had milk cows which produced our diary produce and beef. Also, we raised sheep from which we secured our wool material for clothes, as well as mutton.

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“ One On place was an orchard and from it we obtained our fruit, such as apples, peaches, cherries and berries of various kinds.

“In addition to producing fruit to eat, make preserves and jellies, the apples provided ciders which turned hard, and the peaches provided brandy. Some of the corn was used to make corn whiskey. Almost all the settlers had a still and made their own brandy and whiskey. 3 “Almost any home one may enter those days would be found a jug of hard cider, brandy and whiskey. The customs for the proper welcome of a visitor was to offer a helping of liquor.

“There was always an abundant [supply?] of food. Our smoke-house always contained a plentiful supply of smoked hams and bacon, and these articles of food were smoked with hickory wood. During the winter months, the climate of Ky., is such that meat will keep, without any processing, but in the summer it was necessary to salt and smoke meat. However, during the summer we never went hungry for fresh meat. The forest contained many different kinds of edible animals and fowles, and the game was easily hunted.

“So far as food and clothes for the family were concerned[.?] My father never was worried about an adequate supply. One never needed to worry about hunger. Even a stranger in the community was a welcome guest, and the people went out of their way to give a stranger a start. However, if anyone became obnoxous, the people had their own way of dealing with such matters. If the stamp of disapproval was placed on a man, the party was compelled to leave the community, and in sever cases if they failed to leave in a hurry, they were returned to their creator.

“There was a feud existing between some of the people more or less all the time, and generally one or more decisive fights would take place during the annual reglious campmeeting.

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“There was no regular preacher in our community, but a traveling preacher held services once a month, in a one room log building, and once each year we had a revival which lasted a week. Almost everybody 4 attended the revival meetings. Those that lived at a distance, and attended, would bring a supply of food and camp at the meeting place for the week.

“During the monthly visits of the preacher and during the [revival?], the preacher would busy himself attempting to adjust diferences between parties. The preacher always succeeded in getting many of desputants to shake hands and re-dedicate themselves to relgion religon, but a few would refuse to become dedicated until satisfaction was obtained in fighting it out [and?] mostly with guns.

“The attitude of some of these Ky., folks is well illustrated by an incident told to me by my father, which happened in our community. I shall relate the story as told to me by my father.

“ ' A feud existed between a man named Holder and Jameson. Holder became very ill and it was feared he would die. When the preacher came for his monthly meeting he called on Holder to [preforme?] the usual duties before death. When he [was?] told of the feud, he prevailed on Holder to forgive Jamison. Also Jamison agreed to forget and forgive. After the two men had shaken hands and agreed to be friends so that Holder could leave this world without malice in his heart Holder said.' I want it understood that if I don't die, this farce of an agreement don't stand.'"

“Besides farming, logging was a means of earning a livelihood for many people throughout our district. The timber was cut and the logs were hauled to the Ohio River. From the river the were rafted to various points where sawmills were located. 5 At the time the Civil War terminated my father moved his family to Ark. We traveled in two covered wagons pulled by oxen. We crossed the Mississippi River at Memphis, Tenn, and went on to Pine Bluff.

Father located on a tract of land near Pine Bluff and there I spent my young manhood days. We farmed under about the same conditions as existed in Ky.

“When I was 18 years old I left Ark., for the Indian [T?] territory (now Okla.) I was looking for a job with a cow outfit and finally located a job in what was then called No-Man's -Land. The section was about 300 miles between its E. and W. borders and 50 miles wide from W. to the S. border. At the time the territory was not attached to any state. Since my time there it has become a part of Okla. It is that strip of land extending W. from the main area of Okla., bordering on the N. of the Texas Panhandle.

“No-Man's-Land was used entirely for ranging cattle. There were some mighty large cowcamps located in the territory. [Ranchmen?] were rulers of the territory.

There was no state laws or officals to [goveren?] the section. Only the federal Government had any authority there, and the Government did not maintain any courts or perminent officals to keep order. Therefore, the ranchers maintained such law and order that existed. There was a code or rules which the Ranchers enforced, and had a jail /in which they placed men who violated the law of the section. The jail was a log hut and a man was kept on guard night and day, when anyone was in the jail. 6 “The rules enforced related to the cattle business, such as range rules, branding regulations, punishment for rustling and matters of such nature. So far as the relations between men, there were not any rules to speak of. Each man, more or less, took care of himself, except in the matter of stealing and killing [?] without cause. However, it did not require much cause to justify shooting a man. For instance, if two man became engaged in a quarrel, it was allowable for them to shoot it out and the best shot would be declared to be on the right side. If the shooting resulted fatal to a man, it was considered the result of his own doing [and?] no one should be blamed. But, if a man was caught stealing a yearling, he was the subject of sever punishment, even to being hanged or shot.

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“Because of the condition existing in No-Man's Land, there were many men who came there, to keep out of the law's hands of some state.

“There was an understanding among the people living in No-Man's-Land, that one should not ask questions about a stranger, relating to his name, where he was from or what his former business was. This understanding was closely observed. It was left to the the stranger to volunteer such information as he desired to furnish about himself.

“When a stranger arrived he was accepted as a square man and treated as such, so long as his conduct merited the treatment. With this [condition?] existing, one might think the territory was sort of a den for the scum of the United States, but as a whole 7 the cowhands and the ranchers were about as dependable and square in their dealings as one could trust to meet. Perhaps this was so, because there necessity did not [good?] nor pride tempt man to violate the laws of man. However, the fact is, I never heard of a cowboy being robbed of any article. What money we cowhands had was carried on our person or in our saddle bags. When the saddles were not in use, they would be laid around the camp or chuck wagon. We never feared that anyone would molest our money.

“The citizens of No-Man's-Land behaved better than them of other places, so far as obeying their laws, which was indicated by the kangaroo court records. Almost all the violations were committed by transients.

“The ranchers had a kangroo court before which violators of the code were tried, and the court was seldom called into session.

“My first job on a cow outfit was with the 'ZH' outfit, owned by an eastern [corporation?] called the Muscatine Cattle Company.

“The 'ZH' outfit was one of the large companies ranging cattle in the No-Man's-Land territory. The outfit's brand was carried by 60,000 or more cattle.

“Everything about the camp was kept in excellent shape. There was no slip-shod methods about the work or operation of the ranch[.?]

“The headquarter had a well equipt ranch house, chuck wagons with the best of cooks. The remuda was stocked with the best of [cow-worked?] trained horses that could be [obtained?]. 8 “When I started to work for the 'ZH' outfit, I was what they, in range language, called a greener. This term was applied to one who had not learned the work of a cowboy. My starting wages was $25. per month. This wage was what I received for the first year. Thereafter, my wages were $35 and up to $40 per month.

“After the old rawhides had their fun with me as the butt of their jokes, they took me in hand and did all they could to help me learn the work. So far as riding a horse was concerned, I could do it fairly well, because during the days of my youth, the horse was the chief means of travel. The knack of riding was learned by every country boy. Of course, riding the range and doing cow work required somewhat different riding than the ordinary riding for travel. To learn this difference did not take me long. The part of the work I had to learn completly was handling the lariat. This I did readily, because I had excellent teachers.

“During the first couple months of my range career, I spent most of my time parcticing throwing and handling the lariat. The lariat is the key to a cowboy's success as a workman, and I determined to master the art. I was successful and at the end of my first year's work, I could place the loop where I desired quite accurately. In fact, I was as [proficient?] as the average [waddy?] and when I terminated my career, I could throw the rope with the best of ropers.

“John Roberts, a Texan, was top-screw. This term was applied to indicate the ranch boss. Roberts was a proficient boss and a genuine man in every way. He started me off riding the line. 9 This job is holding the herd [-?] together in a bunch. Almost all of the time, the outfit had more or less cattle cut out and being held for a drive to the market, and these

cattle were held separated from other cattle. This required several riders working night and day.

“This job of line riding was not unplesant work during fair weather, but during inclement weather and at times when the cattle decided to run. During such times the cowhands had his hands full.

“All the cattle on the 'ZH' ranch were the wild longhorn breed and ready to run at any moment. It seemed, at times, they would run for the fun and exercise they received out of a [stampede.?] This section of the counrty was subject to sever electric storms, and when one of these storms struck us we were sure of a job with a running herd. Most of the [times?] we would be successful in holding the herd together and get the [animals?] to milling. Occasionally, we would fail to do so, and when the animals got away from us, it then required work and time to locate and bunch all the cattle. Many times we would fail to find all the animals. However, these would be located during the general roundup.

“I do not suppose there is an old cowhand who cannot, mentaly and vividly, hear the snapping hoofs, clashing horns and the drumming of the [anamiles?] feet hitting the ground, which came to their ears while a herd stampeded.

“During the darkness and a storm raging, the noise had an ominous sound. One could sence the danger ahead, because at these 10 times it was necessary to ride at the best speed a horse could give, and do it over rough ground. A cowhand was playing with Lady Luckevery minute of the run. If the horse hit a hole or stumbled over a rock, thereby going down, the rider could not see what there was to avoid, and perhaps be thrown onto a rock or under the feet of the crazed and running animals.

“On two occasions an 'ZH' waddy were killed, caused by a fall from a stumbling horse. Broken bones were a frequent occurrance.

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“Next to a stampede our most dreaded event was the coming of of a severe norther. The cattle would sence the approaching weather and started drifting two or more days ahead of its arrival. The cattle drifted to hunt for shelter. If we did not hold the animals back, the cattle would scatter in the lee of the storm. The severity of the storm determined the distance the animals would drift. If the was exceedingly severe, it was [impossible?] to keep a herd [bunched?]. The animals would drift to the lee side of a hill or to a cluster of trees, but in a little while they would move on trusting to find better shelter. Therefore, / there was more or less a constant movement of the cattle.

“These northers were not a frequent occurrance, and luckly for the ranchers it was not often. Because, after one of these severe northers. It required several weeks work hunting strays, and at that a large number of strays would not be found till the general roundup.

“The general roundups were held each year. These were held in the spring and fall. The affairs were called a general roundup 11 because all the cowcamps of a range territory would join into one outfit, operating under one roundup boss. During this roundup, the country would be thoroughly combed for cattle- one section at a time. The cattle were driven into the roundup headquarters, and there the cattle were cut out and separated according to their brands, the yearlings branded and the males casterated.

“Besides the crews of the cowcamps of the particular territory in which the roundup was working, representatives of distant cowcamps would be on hand to take charge of any animals of their brand, that by chance might be found. A few animals would be [found?] belonging to cowcamps a 100 miles or more away.

“The roundup required about three month's time to accomplish the work, and during this time we lived a chuck wagon life. [We?] sleept out in the open rolled in our blankets. Our food was cooked over a camp fire, but was good and plentiful. The variety was satisfactory, consisting of canned vegetables, dried fruit and some pastery. The meat was almost entirely beef, which was to be expected, because it was the cheapest meat supply.

However, we had some bacon. To vary the meat diet, occasionally some of us [would?] kill some game. Buffalos were still existing in rather large numbers during my stay in No-Man's- Land, and we ate lot of buffalo meat of the choice cuts.

“I have mentioned our [dread?] of [stampedes?] and drifts, but I must not fail to tell about the worst of all conditions which we were in constant fear, and this was the prairie fire. 12 “Every waddy was instructed to keep constant watch for fires, and when smoke was seen to drop what one was doing, regardless of how important it was, and ride to where the smoke was being produced. We all followed this rule strictly, because it was necessary to stop a fire before it had a chance to spread.

“If a fire started during a dry period, it did take long to spread in dry grass, especially the tall buffalo grass when a fair or high wind was blowing. A prairie fire of considerable extent is not only destructive to the grazing feed but to animal life also. There is absolutely no chance to hold cattle from stampeding in all directions when a fire is traveling behind the animals.

“I saw one of the most extensive prairie fires which took place in the No-Man's-Land country. It swept over a front of 100 or more miles and traveled about 150 miles before it was put under control. All the cowhands for miles around fought this fire. There were at least 1000 men fighting at a time.

“The method we employed to fight a prairie fire was using green cow hides. We weighted the head and fore feet part to hold the hide on the ground. A rope was tied to each of the hind feet part of the hide, and then a mounted cowboy took hold of each and dragged the hide over the fire. Thus most of the fire would be smothered. A crew followed the drag and whipped out the remaining fire. This method was successful fighting a fire in short grass, but could not be used against tall buffalo grass. To fight a fire 12 in tall grass, it was necessary to set back fires. This was done by burning grass ahead of the fire [and?] keeping the back fire under controll.

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“AfterI worked two years on the 'ZH' range, I decided to get [married?] and I returned to Ark., where the lady I desired lived. After I married I farmed for a livelihood. I returned to Okla., several years later and spent about six months working for a large cattle outfit that were buying feeders and fattening the stock on corn. The job I had was hauling corn to the many cribs scattered over the range. This outfit had a fence range and were feeding about 2000 head. Of course, the herd varied, but animals were moving out to the market and others moving in from ranges of the S.W. constantly.

“There is only one feature about the work of feeding cron [worth?] mentioning, and this is the action of the wild range cattle upon [arrival?]. At first the animals would snort at the corn and back away from it. When they saw other cattle eating the corn their couriosity would be aroused and they [would?] investigate, but treat the corn with contempt for several days. Finally the cattle would take a taste and then be gluttons for a while.

“After I quit the feeding job, I ended my range career and put the remainder of my working life at farming.